

Syntactic ergativity as epiphenomenon of feature inheritance

Outline A subset of morphologically ergative languages exhibits a ban on \bar{A} -movement (relativization, interrogatives, topicalization, etc.) of transitive subjects. In search of its trigger, I examine a corpus of 24 languages from 9+2 families (Table 1) with respect to their barred types of ergative extraction, their repair strategies (antipassive, resumption, etc.), and present the following generalization: syntactic ergativity (SE) emerges derivationally in those particular configurations whose C head lacks (usually) a *wh*-feature, or alternatively, *phi*-features (Table 2).

Theoretical background I adopt a system of C-to-T inheritance of ϕ (ϕ) and Case (K) features (Richards 2007; Chomsky 2008), with two crucial assumptions: (i) the presence of any uninterpretable feature [uF] on phasal heads is a prerequisite for their specifier to be a legitimate final target of movement involving valuation; (ii) [$u\phi$] and [uwh] are not universally available, but may be absent in some languages, as tested by certain diagnostics: morphological overtiness subsumed to the lexicon for the former, or effects linked to the latter, like superiority, landing sites, and binding.

Proposal I suggest that SE arises as an epiphenomenon of the configuration-specific parameter on availability of (semantically non-interpreted) [uwh] or [$u\phi$] features: the presence of both entails no extraction ban; the absence of one of two (in principle possibly of [$u\phi$] instead of [uwh], as in Kanamari) causes the relevant restriction (Chukchi instantiating both scenarios in different extraction types); the lack of both should generally impede clause-bound movement, as in Tongan, which forms content questions either in-situ or via pseudo-clefts. Similarly, if some language lacks [uwh] on C, but forms, say, content interrogatives either in-situ or by means of a distinct trigger (e.g., a Topic/Focus feature), SE should not emerge, as in Eskaleut or Tagalog, which show non-clause-initial fronted interrogatives, distinct landing sites for different categories, no superiority effects, and information-structure properties.

Analysis In those syntactically ergative languages, C involves a single uninterpretable feature (usually [$u\phi$]), along with any interpretable scope-discourse/operator (Op) feature [iF] (e.g., Q, Rel), as it lacks [uwh]. Thus, if a DP contains an equivalent Op [uF], feature inheritance is obviated and C needs to keep its [$u\phi$]/[K] bundle so that its specifier can be licensed to host the moving DP, otherwise the latter will fail to value its [uF]. Phi-agreement and absolutive (ABS) assignment therefore take place at CP, to which the object has to successively-cyclically raise for case. Yet if the transitive subject (already ergative-marked by v^*) carries an Op [uF], then it will be prioritized to raise to SpecCP due to higher specificity (holding more features that match C, viz., [K] and [Op]), which results in valuing its own [uF], but also in checking C's [K] (a possibility independently motivated by case stacking) and stranding the object with no case, whose unvalued [uK] leads the derivation to crash.

Predictions (i) If a marked ABS language involves inverse ABS assignment by v^* (and of ERG by C/T), a lack of [uwh] on C should restrict \bar{A} -movement of the ABS: Roviana (Corston 1996) is likely to fit this profile. (ii) If ABS is assigned in SpecCP, then this position should (partly) exhibit A-properties: indeed in Tagalog (1), a fronted interrogative pronoun shows no Weak Crossover effects. (iii) If a [uwh] was somehow involved in an otherwise *wh*-less syntactically ergative construction, then SE should disappear: the single counterexample (2) to the general absence of ergative extraction in Shipibo internally-headed relative clauses exceptionally contains an overt *wh*-element. (iv) If a NOM-ACC language lacked [uwh], it should impose some equivalent restriction on \bar{A} -movement of the object across the subject. Late Archaic Chinese (Aldridge 2010) and Slovenian (3) (Hladnik 2015) are plausible candidates.

Conclusion SE reduces to a contextual side-effect of the lack of certain

features *qua* triggers, constraining C-to-T feature inheritance. Further consequences on case assignment, movement/agreement for feature valuation, the A/ \bar{A} distinction, and interface interaction are explored, framed within a copy theory of movement.

LANGUAGE FAMILY	SYNTACTICALLY ERGATIVE	SYNTACTICALLY NON-ERGATIVE
Austronesian	Balinese, Seediq, Tagalog, Tongan, (Tukang Besi)	Niuean
Chukotko-Kamchatkan	Chukchi (in relative clauses)	Chukchi (in <i>wh</i> -interrogatives)
Eskaleut	Inuktitut, South Baffin, Greenlandic	
Katukinan	Kanamari	
Nakh-Dagestanian		Hunzib, Ingush, Lezgian, Tsez
Oceanic	Roviana	
Pama-Nyungan	Dyirbal	Ngiyambaa, Pitjantjatjara, Warlpiri
Pano-Tacanan	Shipibo-Konibo	
Tsimshianic	Gitskan	
(Language isolate)	Trumai	Basque

Tableau 1: Language corpus examined

	+ φ	- φ
+ <i>wh</i>	-SE (e.g. Warlpiri, Basque, Chukchi <i>wh</i> -questions)	+SE (e.g. Kanamari)
- <i>wh</i>	+SE (e.g. Greenlandic/Chukchi relative clauses, Tagalog, Shipibo)	+SE (e.g. Tongan)

Tableau 2: Interaction between availability of [*uw*h]/[*u* φ] on C and SE

- (1) *Sino_i ang yumayapos sa=anak niya_i?*
 who NOM IMPF.AV-hug DAT=child 3.SG.GEN
 ‘Who_i hugs her_i daughter?’ (Miller 1988:113-114)
- (2) [*Jawerato-n-ki yokat-ai*] *ja meni-kati-kan-ai.*
 which-ERG-INT ask-PPI:ABS 3:ABS give-PST4-PL-INC
 ‘They gave her (her daughter) to whoever asked for (her).’ (Valenzuela 2003:473)
- (3) a. *prijateljica, ki ____{NOM} igra šah*
 friend.FEM that play.3SG chess
 ‘the friend who plays chess’
 b. *prijateljica, ki *(jo) pogrešam*
 friend.FEM that she.ACC.CL miss.1SG
 ‘the friend who I miss’ (Hladnik 2015:27)

Ref.: Aldridge, E. 2010. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 19(1). • Bittner, M. & K. Hale. 1996. *Linguistic Inquiry* 27. • Chomsky, N. 2008. On phases. • Corstons, S. H. 1996. *Ergativity in Roviana, Solomon Islands*. • Hladnik, M. 2015. *Mind the Gap*. • Miller, B. 1988. *Non-configurationality in Tagalog*. • Richards, M. 2007. On feature inheritance. • Valenzuela, P. M. 2003. *Transitivity in Shipibo-Konibo Grammar*.